

**Morro Bay National Estuary Program
Program Evaluation Status
For 2025**

Prepared for the Executive Committee February 2021 Meeting

This memo provides the status of the required actions outlined in the Program Evaluation (PE) letter from the 2020 review by EPA.

Reporting on Changes in Conditions and Outcomes

Status: Ongoing

Feedback from PE process: EPA would like to see calculations or estimates of pollutant reduction due to CCMP actions, whenever feasible. Would like to see these results shared in the annual work plan and the MBNEP website.

Activities to address comment:

- The Estuary Program and Cal Poly received a NEP Coastal Watersheds Grant in late 2020, which will fund two years of research related to eelgrass restoration and monitoring. A microclimate study will measure water quality parameters within an eelgrass bed and in a nearby area without eelgrass for comparison. Differences in these measurements would quantify the improvements in water quality from eelgrass.
- Completion of the CCER floodplain restoration project included engineering estimates of sediment reduction due to reduced erosion at the site. These values will be reported to EPA through the website (<https://www.mbnep.org/our-impact/>) and annual reports.
- Whenever possible, MBNEP incorporates pre- and post-project monitoring designed to provide data of pollutant reduction or restoration success. This is constrained by project type and monitoring feasibility (both in terms of logistics and cost).
- Staff is developing the idea of sharing this type of information along with CCMP implementation status (see below).

CCMP Implementation

Status: Ongoing

Feedback from PE process: EPA liked the internal tracking system we developed to monitor CCMP implementation progress. They would like to see a public-facing version of the information, perhaps in the Annual Report or on the website.

Activities to address comment:

- Staff are beginning conversations to establish a webpage tracking CCMP implementation progress in a very public-friendly manner. It will likely follow a dashboard type format and show the number of action plans underway within priority areas such as Land Conservation, Monitoring & Research, etc.

Program Implementation and Reporting – Outreach and Public Involvement

Status: Ongoing

Feedback from PE process: EPA would like to see more outreach efforts specifically targeting visitors to Morro Bay. EPA would also like to see outreach materials geared toward a diversity of visitors.

Activities to address comment:

- Estuary Program staff member Rachel Pass is serving as co-chair for the SLO Marine Protected Area (MPA) Collaborative, a group of nonprofits, agencies, and private citizens within the county who work together on monitoring, education, and enforcement issues within local MPAs. The group recently completed translation and printing in Spanish of a popular kids activity booklet highlighting wildlife within the county's MPAs. The booklet is also available online.
- Additional SLO MPA Collaborative efforts include education and outreach opportunities for the public to learn about MPA wildlife, habitats, and regulations.
- Staff are coordinating with the County Stormwater Program to partner on efforts to spread clean water messaging through social media campaigns. These campaigns reach both locals and visitors and promote reducing nonpoint source pollution, in particular marine debris, in our coastal area.

Water Reuse and Hazard Mitigation

Status: Ongoing

Feedback from PE process: EPA encourages projects such as the Pennington Creek rainwater catchment project to help address future water supply challenges. EPA recommends further consideration of the stressors identified in the Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA) to determine potential hazard mitigation projects. EPA would like, where possible, for the Estuary Program to establish pre-disaster partnerships and post-disaster approaches to conduct monitoring and to identify CCMP Actions that would assist in building resilience to hazards and the changing climate.

Activities to address comment:

- Over the past year, the Estuary Program has been reviewing the CVA which was originally completed in 2016. Hazards and potential solutions to address them have been reviewed and updated where appropriate. The document update is nearly complete.
- The Estuary Program is working to complete phase 3 of the Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve project, an effort to successfully reconnect the creek to its floodplain. The last plantings, plant monitoring, and channel monitoring are underway.
- Staff have been continuing work on the Conservation Planning Initiative (CPI), a document to outline challenges to habitat and establish targets to measure habitat health. Many of these metrics, such as surface water flow, water quality parameters, changes in wetland areas, etc. are impacted by the challenges outlined in the CVA. The plan also outlines projects and efforts to mitigate for these potential hazards.
- COVID has led to the development of procedures and protocols for safely operating the office and for staff and volunteers to safely conduct fieldwork. These activities address post-disaster approaches to allow the continuation of valuable monitoring efforts.